



NATURE MEANS BUSINESS

ESTABLISHING THE BALANCE
BETWEEN FOOD PRODUCTION
AND IMPROVING NATURE



FOREWORD

MARTIN LINES

UK CHAIR, NATURE FRIENDLY
FARMING NETWORK



The science is clear, we are facing a climate and ecological crisis. Over 40% of UK species are declining and one in ten is threatened with extinction. Populations of grey partridge have declined by 85% and our soils and landscapes have been catastrophically degraded by previous agriculture policies that incentivised intensive food production.

The alarm bell has been rung and heard.

With more than 70% of the UK's land managed as farmland, farmers are one of the best tools that the Government has to deliver on food security, biodiversity and climate targets. However, UK farming is in a challenging economic situation. Without clear direction from governments and policy makers, there's a lot of uncertainty and not enough action.

Now that we are leaving the European Union, the UK has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reverse these damages and help farmers to understand that long-term business sustainability, resilience to market and climate challenges, and financial viability means working in harmony with nature.

The research presented in this report identifies how the current farming model is not serving the profitability of farm businesses or our environment. If farmers continue to degrade natural assets, then the farming industry will collapse. Business as usual is not an option.

Farming policy needs to support the industry to rapidly move to a sustainable output model that enhances natural capital and nature, or else farming businesses will go bust.

New research shows us that 80% of people in the UK want to buy food that protects and restores nature and is not damaging the environment. There is also a huge demand (80%) from the public for public money to support UK farmers to not just



PHOTO: MARTIN LINES



FOREWORD—MARTIN LINES

maintain but improve the environment and wildlife on UK farms.

Is it time to change the definition of a farmer's role in society? I believe it is.

Post-war, farmers were defined as food producers to feed the nation, yet this had negative impacts on the environment, climate and the quality of our food. Much of what we produce in 2020 is not food we can eat but feed for livestock or products to generate energy. This means that a vast amount of productive farmland is no longer managed to produce healthy, high-quality and nutritious food and our landscape is being pushed to its tipping point.

Increasingly, I see the role of a farmer as someone who delivers a combination of food production, climate mitigation and nature protection. The research and stories, from nature-friendly farmers, highlighted in this report clearly show that there is a sweet spot for farmers to aim for. If we get the balance between food production and nature right, we get the best value out of our landscapes and farming businesses are more profitable. This will also help to better position businesses to benefit from a 'public money for public goods' approach to future farm support, as is proposed in England and Wales.

But if we continue to push our production above and beyond the landscape's capability, nature and farm businesses will be wiped out. Farming below the

sustainable output model not only leads to a lower financial return, but the lack of a managed farming system to deliver nature's recovery, wildlife may continue to decline. And this is simply not an option.

As we head into a new farming system, and as governments determine how farmers work with nature and produce food for the nation, the NFFN is calling for everyone – farmers, politicians and citizens alike – to support nature-friendly farming and help us reverse the climate and ecological crises.

"The NFFN is calling for everyone – farmers, politicians and citizens alike – to support nature-friendly farming and help us reverse the climate and ecological crises."

Governments can and must be bold and deliver long-term solutions now so that farmers can build sustainable and resilient farm businesses that produce healthy food and protect our natural world for future generations to enjoy. 🌱



PHOTO: SORCHA LEWIS

FOREWORD

BEN GOLDSMITH

NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DEFRA



Most people are conscious that the natural fabric of our country has been degraded, but few realise the full extent of the catastrophe that has unfolded around us, particularly in recent decades.

Depressingly, the U.K. now ranks amongst the most nature impoverished nations on Earth. Expectations diminish from one generation to the next as we become conditioned to what we know in our own lifetimes, in a process known as shifting baselines. Personal accounts from earlier centuries describe meadows and woodland glades carpeted in wildflowers and hedgerows and woodland thronged with songbirds. Moreover, the very soil on which we depend has been abused, eroded and diminished to the extent that scientists now warn that our very ability to produce food in Britain is becoming threatened.

The Nature Friendly Farming Network, brilliantly led by Martin Lines, has arisen out of the understanding that farming, done well, offers us a way of the mess we've created. Until now the way Common Agriculture Policy payments have been allocated has encouraged farmers to work every square inch of their land, no matter how suitable for food production. Trees, wetlands, scrub, ponds are all deemed "ineligible features." If

farmers want to keep the money flowing, they must remove these important habitats. For nature, this has been a disaster. Brexit offers the opportunity now for the U.K. to replace this system of perverse incentives with something so much better. Under the new UK Government's Agriculture Bill farmers will be directly rewarded for restoring nature on their land. 'Public money for public good' is the term used to describe the new approach.

On our most productive land, particularly across the East of England, farmers will be incentivised to draw upon ancient wisdom and the learnings of organic and biodynamic farmers, together with the best of modern technology, to bring about advances in both productivity and sustainability. The new scheme will also encourage the creation of wild corridors through such farms, along streams and rivers and through fat hedgerows heaving with berries.

Across the rest of Britain, especially in our upland landscapes, intensive farming is simply not viable



without subsidies. The environmental cost of trying to make it work has been catastrophic. With the exception of small pockets, trees, scrub, wildflowers, birdsong are largely absent on our hills and valleys. People think of our upland National Parks as great nature reserves, but they are not. Sadly, there is often less wildlife in these parts of the UK than in surrounding areas. One of the consequences is flooding. The science is crystal clear: if you strip the hills of nature you significantly exacerbate the cycle of flash-flooding and seasonal drought. Bare hills are simply unable to absorb and hold back water after heavy rainfall.

In these landscapes the new scheme will reward a transition to a way of farming which recreates the fundamental natural processes that have

governed our remoter landscapes for millennia. The browsing, grazing and trampling of native cattle is the key ingredient for restoring the kind of dynamic wood pastures that once blanketed much of Britain. Rich in scrub and rich in wildflowers, wood pastures comprise an intricate, shape-shifting mosaic which teems with life in an abundance that we are unused to seeing in Britain today. A ground-breaking [economic study](#) of upland livestock farming shows how extensive grazing of livestock and the recovery of nature delivers significantly improved economic resilience for marginal farming businesses. If we support farmers in making this transition a bonus will be the growth of nature tourism which has huge additional potential.

“British farming is heading into an era of great and exciting change, in which farmers work with rather than against the grain of nature.”

British farming is heading into an era of great and exciting change, in which farmers work with rather than against the grain of nature. Thank goodness for the Nature Friendly Farming Network and its crucial work building a movement by farmers, for farmers, to take us to the promised land. 🍀

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FARMING

The UK farming landscape is at a significant moment in history for both farming and the planet. As we leave the European Union, Governments across all four nations have the opportunity to shape the future of farming and meet commitments to leave the environment in a better state than they found it.

The UK Government's Trade, Environment and Agriculture Bills, which are currently going through Parliament, will result in important policies likely to have considerable impacts on farming in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Nature Means Business report, from the Nature Friendly Farming Network, brings together evidence and farmer stories that present the business case for farming in harmony with nature. This evidence can be used by policy makers and the farming industry to help them make real commitments and practical actions to support sustainable, climate and nature friendly agriculture.

Building on a significant amount of work from Chris Clark, the Chair of the NFFN England Steering Group, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and the RSPB, new on-farm research helps us understand the

underlying economics of farming and how these can be improved to both benefit the environment and increase the financial resilience of these businesses.

This evidence is backed up by personal stories from five nature-friendly farmers across the UK, who highlight the nature-friendly changes they have made to their farms and how this has made their businesses more resilient and profitable.

The NFFN is grateful for the ongoing support from its advisory partners and other leading organisations. 💧



“The farming sector has a moral obligation to switch to nature friendly farming. We can and must become part of the solution slowing, halting and then reversing the biodiversity and climate free-fall.

There is an extraordinary amount of potential within the industry to address these issues if we have government support, but we need to see it happen quickly.”

Denise Walton, Peelham Farm and NFFN farmer, Scotland.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING

New Opinium research of 2,083 adults, commissioned by the Nature Friendly Farming Network, reveals public demand for Government to fund climate and nature-friendly farming. The results show that people do not want the policy to reward 'business as usual' and calls for greater funding for nature-friendly farming:



Three quarters (76%) of the UK think that the government should provide better support to UK farmers that are tackling wildlife and environmental decline.



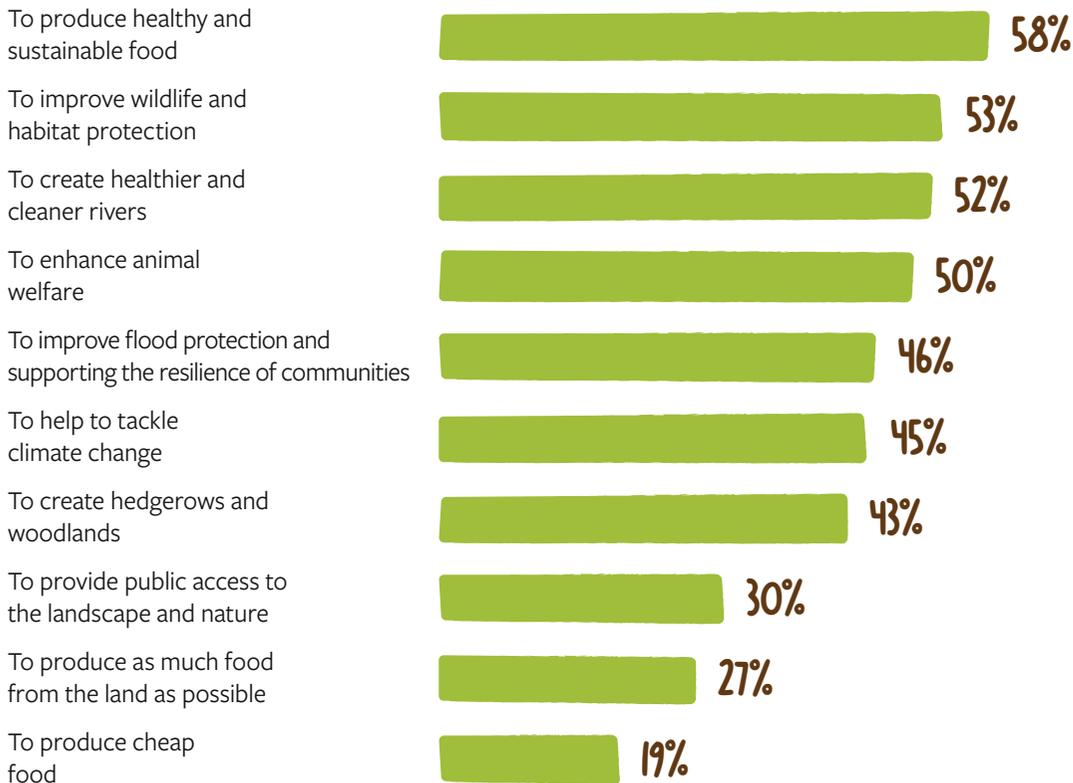
Seven in ten people (70%) do not want public money to reward 'business as usual' approaches or allow damaging farm practices to continue.



Three quarters (75%) of the UK are calling for public money to help farmers produce healthy soils, food, landscapes, rivers, and help wildlife to recover and flourish.

Public demands health, sustainability and environmental benefits over cheap food.

The majority (over 50%) of the UK wants public goods to help farmers deliver environmental benefits, such as habitat protection and clean rivers, while producing healthy and sustainable food. Only two in ten people (19%) want public money to support farmers with producing cheap food.



UK public calls for greater protections in law and long-term funding for farmers



Eight in ten people (81%) are calling for food and environmental standards to be put into law, to protect long-term food security.



Eight in ten people (81%) want future farming policies to support UK farmers to not just maintain but improve the environment and wildlife on UK farms.

People in the UK want to buy nature-friendly food and think that farmers are vital to enhancing local communities and protecting the environment



Eight in ten (80%) people want to buy food that protects and restores nature and is not damaging the environment.



Over three quarters of the UK (76%) want to buy food from local farmers that protects wildlife and reduces our carbon emissions.



81% of the UK want farming in harmony with nature to be the norm across the UK.



77% of the UK want their local MP to support UK farmers that farm with nature.



78% of the UK think UK farmers are vital to enhancing local communities and protecting the environment.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

CHRIS CLARK, CHAIR OF NFFN FOR ENGLAND



Post Second World War, there was an understandable drive to produce more food in the UK. Government policy actively encouraged this, and the teaching and mindset of those working in agriculture altered to produce high volumes of food which often was only achieved by using additional inputs into farming systems.

It has been considered, and indeed encouraged, that higher levels of production can be linked to improved farm profitability. Often the role of nature within all of this has not been examined and seen only as an additional burden to be managed rather than an integral partner in the farm business.

Recent studies have shown that farm businesses need to review production costs, outputs, and the role of farm support schemes, but also consider that their ultimate profitability could actually be inextricably linked to their partnership with nature. The research has shown that farmers continuously working with high-input high-output systems often experience less profit or are unable to break even financially. So how can this be explained?

Chris Clark, farmer and Chair of NFFN for England, has been conducting business research along with colleagues at Nethergill Associates. The study involved analyses of 43 farm businesses, by examining business incomes and accounts at current output levels and with further adjusted calculations where support payments were decreased or removed totally.

The resulting 'Less is More' report funded by RSPB, National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts used results based on findings from upland and marginal farms. Since then, further studies in 2020 by Nethergill Associates have taken place with different types of farm businesses in other areas in the UK. The results from the latter studies have still produced the same traits and conclusions of the original report.

LESS IS MORE REPORT CONCEPTS

To fully appreciate the report findings there needs to be an awareness of the following business terms used:

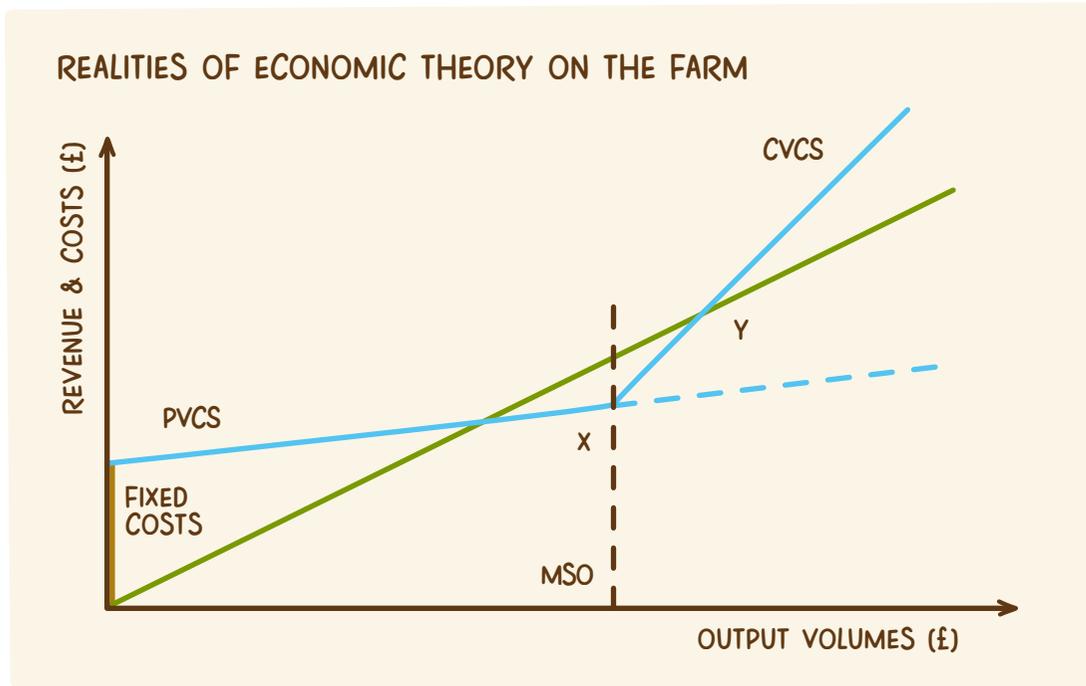
Natural Capital

Nature provides farmers with 'natural capital' for their businesses in the form of soils, grass, water and geology, which farm businesses work with for crop or livestock production to take place. Where these 'free issue' assets are not managed correctly, farm productivity will reduce. Taken beyond their natural production limit, for example by increasing stocking levels to more than the grass can cope with or cropping more than the soil can naturally support, the farming businesses will need to adapt to maintain production. This is achieved via additional inputs such as fertilisers or the requirement to purchase additional feed to maintain the productivity. This increases the overall costs of production and potentially reduces the profitability of the farm business.

Farm business terminology

All farm businesses have their related running costs subdivided into two areas:

1. **Fixed costs** to the farm business which are unavoidable - e.g. rent, rates, insurance, land charges, labour, machinery depreciation
2. **Variable costs** - e.g. fuel, seed, fertiliser, animal feed, pesticides, contract labour



The 'Less is More' report has subdivided the variable costs further into:

Productive Variable Costs' (PVC's) – such as contract labour and home-grown feeds

Corrective Variable costs (CVC's) - such as grass substitute feed, artificial fertilisers, vet medicine

The graph above shows the results from the farm business studies, by plotting associated costs.

Results

1. There is a point at which productive variable costs, turn into added corrective variable costs, showing that variable costs as a whole are non-linear.
2. The point where PVC's turn into CVC's is shown as the **Maximum Sustainable Output (MSO)**.
3. **Maximum Sustainable Output** shows the volume of outputs that can be achieved before they need to be corrected with additional inputs to maintain production.
4. This destroys completely the phenomenon of economies of scale.
5. Profitability can deteriorate as outputs are expanded.
6. The long-term benefits are that not only farming, but nature too, gains from this approach.
7. Further research has since confirmed the original findings of the 'Less is More' report. There is also growing evidence that if you revert too far back to nature managing itself (rewilding) then nature and species diversity suffers, as well as production.
8. A balanced nature and sustainable farm management approach is a win-win situation for all. 🌱

Conclusion and recommendations

1. Different analysis of business accounts and forecasting are vital to comprehend nature's contribution to farm businesses.
2. By working with the 'free issue' of nature, the farm business has its best opportunity of pursuing a profitable outcome.
3. By establishing the Maximum Sustainable Output (MSO) point of a business, nature management and the role it plays in the farm business becomes evident. The MSO point can vary year to year. The aim should be to farm to the MSO line to get maximum returns both for nature & business. For those farming to the right of the MSO line, income could increase, if the system were less reliant on other non-nature inputs.
4. Farmers need to learn to farm with nature. Natural productivity should be increased to the maximum sustainable output (MSO) level. Beyond this, farmers will degrade the natural asset and reduce profitability as additional inputs are required.
5. Farm business mindset needs to move from high productivity at all costs to a balance of farming with natural assets and careful management for our countryside.
6. The long-term benefits are that not only farming, but nature too, gains from this approach.
7. Further research has since confirmed the original findings of the 'Less is More' report. There is also growing evidence that if you revert too far back to nature managing itself (rewilding) then nature and species diversity suffers, as well as production.
8. A balanced nature and sustainable farm management approach is a win-win situation for all. 🌱

CASE STUDY

DAVID LORD

EARLS HALL FARM, ENGLAND



David Lord is part of England's NFFN steering group. He farms 750 hectares of mixed soils, predominantly heavy London Clay, on the North East Essex Coast.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

I am lucky to come from a farming family that have maintained traditional habitats on our farm. For a long time, we have had hedges with good-sized verges, flower-rich margins and wild bird seed plots. All of these are managed to maximise their environmental value. But our most recent change, a move to no-tillage, more diverse crop rotation and the use of cover crops, has multiplied our natural capital and transformed the way we farm and the amount of nature our farm can support.

What have been the impacts of these practices?

Our boundary features, like hedges, flower-rich margins and bird seed mixes, support bird and insect life all year round, giving them food, cover and nesting habitat. The move to no-tillage and cover cropping has developed our fields into diverse habitats that produce food whilst being home to an array of wildlife. By not disturbing our soils we protect the ecosystem and by using cover crops we nearly always have living plants in the soil.

CASE STUDY—DAVID LORD

How has nature friendly farming made your farm more sustainable and financially viable in the long term?

Our main asset is our soil, so it's regeneration and health are essential to me, as a farmer, but also to society. Healthy soil can sink carbon, reduce pollution, improve air quality and produce food. Nature thrives on diversity and farming is no different. A healthy farm with good soils and managed habitats makes my business more resilient.

What do you need from government, post Brexit, to continue farming in a nature friendly way?

If I am under financial strain in the short term, I could farm much more cost-effectively by ignoring nature. To keep farming in a nature friendly way, I need financial support via payments for delivery of public goods and protection from food imports produced to lower environmental standards.

Farming has the potential to alleviate many of society's ills, including sinking carbon to arrest climate change, managing habitat to reverse biodiversity decline and producing healthy foods to combat obesity. To do this, society has to own the problems it creates and fund the solutions.

What are your concerns around future farming payments from the government?

Long term commitment is essential. Delivery of nature friendly farming takes time to establish and maintain but can be torn apart in a very short time.

How can the government raise environmental standards across the farming industry?

Baseline standards for minimum environmental delivery are needed to reinforce the protection of our natural capital and to provide a structure that farmers can then build upon, by adding funded environmental value to their farms.

What would be your core message/advice to the government/other farmers to make the most of nature-friendly farming?

We need a long-term commitment to a simple, pragmatic and well-funded scheme, coupled with good communication between the government and farmers, and facilitation of knowledge exchange between farmers. 🍀



PHOTO: DAVID LORD

“Nature thrives on diversity and farming is no different. A healthy farm with good soils and managed habitats makes my business more resilient.”

CASE STUDY

CHARLIE COLE

BROUGHGAMMON FARM,
NORTHERN IRELAND



Charlie Cole manages Broughgammon Farm on the North coast of Antrim. His farm, famous for its award-winning rose veal and goat burgers, has been championing sustainability and the principle of 'forward-thinking farming' since 2012.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced onto your farm?

Nature friendly farming is the ethos of our business, it is what we have always done. We graze our lands sensitively to protect plants and wildlife and have restored hedges and woodlands around the farm. Other practices have increased our yields and the business' bottom line, all whilst enhancing the farm's carbon storage capacity.

What have been the impacts of nature friendly farming practices?

We have found nature friendly farming improves our quality of life, with more wildflowers and more wild animals on our land. We have also noticed a positive change in our mental health as a result of being more integrated with nature and enhancing habitats for new biodiversity. For years, the industry has focused on increasing yields, diminishing our connection with the customer and creating negative consequences for our landscape, but we have the opportunity to change this.

CASE STUDY—CHARLIE COLE

How has nature friendly farming made your farm more sustainable and financially viable in the long term?

Our financial sustainability has definitely increased through nature friendly farming. We also benefit from using renewable energy, including solar panels and solar thermal on our butchery. Having these means we no longer need to buy electricity. We also have more contingency money, as, whatever we don't use on the farm, we sell back to the grid.

What do you need from government, post Brexit, to continue farming in a nature friendly way?

Farming is a long-term game and any disruptions, like Brexit, undermine our potential. We rely heavily on a fair-trading marketplace, so farmers in Northern Ireland need clarity and economic stability. Governing bodies also need to improve funding access. Currently, the most accessible funding in Northern Ireland is for planting wildlife borders or hedges, but we need easier access to the higher tier funding that encourages management of natural resources, not just their implementation.

How can the government raise the environmental standards across the farming industry?

The government needs to legislate and increase farmer engagement in nature friendly practices, which requires incentives. The environment is a cost that we never accounted for, and the government needs to be accountable, implementing policies that make it easier for farmers to transition to a nature friendly farming approach.

What would be your core message/advice to the government/other farmers to make the most of nature-friendly farming?

Without changes, our natural resources will deplete. The government must provide a positive vision of what can be achieved through nature friendly farming and commit to building on the environmental successes that have been secured through current policy. They need to encourage new entrants into farming and support innovation and mainstream agroecological practices within our agricultural colleges. 🍀



“The environment is a cost that we never accounted for, and the government needs to be accountable”

CASE STUDY

DENISE WALTON

PEELHAM FARM, SCOTLAND



When Denise and her husband took on Peelham Farm in Scotland 30 years ago, it was in a decrepit state, resulting from previous short-term farming management practices. Over the last three decades, Denise has adopted habitat restoration techniques that allow her to farm with nature. Her farm is now Mixed Organic & Pasture-for-Life Certified.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

On our farm, we care about protecting our soils and wildlife which we do in two main ways. First, we don't use any agrochemicals, including herbicides, pesticides and artificial fertilisers. Second, we focus on habitat creation and restoration. We support our natural woodlands and hedgerows, thickets and ponds, species-rich grasslands and wetlands. We have also set up bird boxes to help encourage barn owls and tree sparrows.

What have been the impacts of these practices?

Nature friendly farming practices have resulted in a rise in wildlife on the farm. We have seen a particular increase in habitat indicator species, which are species that show the overall health of the local environment, including Tree Sparrows and Grey Partridge and a recent return of two nationally rare species Corn Bunting, and the Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly.

CASE STUDY—DENISE WALTON

How has nature friendly farming made your farm more sustainable and financially viable in the long term?

At the core of our business ethos is the growing partnership between our farming practices and nature. We continue to make this partnership as strong as possible. Nature friendly farming makes our farm more resilient. Since going organic we have built our soil health and have fewer pests and diseases. Natural insect predators, such as Ladybirds, are more evident. Our customers also want to know that biodiversity is part and parcel of our farming practice and that is why they buy our products. Supporting the environment and biodiversity sets us apart from other farms and contributes to making us financially viable.

What do you need from government, post Brexit, to continue farming in a nature friendly way?

To continue farming in a nature friendly way we need more support from the government post-Brexit. We need to see policy and subsidy support to pay for public goods that nature friendly farms produce, like carbon sequestration, healthy soils, clean air and water, and the protection of habitats and wildlife.

What are your concerns around future farming payments from the government?

I'm concerned that without the government committing to future farming payments, farmers won't invest in wildlife. It is crucial, given that species loss and climate change are now in free-fall, that we have the government behind us. We can be and want to be a significant part of the solution, but we need support and commitment from the government in the form of farming payments.

What would be your core message/advice to the government/other farmers to make the most of nature-friendly farming?

The farming sector has a moral obligation to switch to nature friendly farming. We can and must become part of the solution slowing, halting and then reversing the biodiversity and climate free-fall. There is an extraordinary amount of potential within the industry to address these issues if we have government support, but we need to see it happen quickly. 🍀

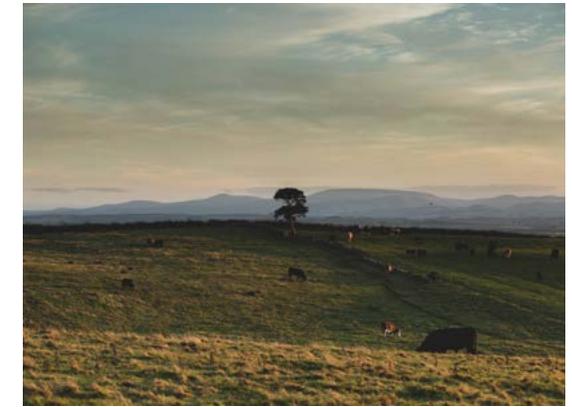


PHOTO: DENISE WALTON

“It is crucial, given that species loss and climate change are now in free-fall, that farmers have the government behind them. We can be and want to be a significant part of the solution.”

CASE STUDY

GETHIN OWEN

NANT YR EFAIL FARM, WALES



Gethin owns a 150-acre, part-owned and part-rented, beef and sheep farm on the North Wales coast. The farm has 30 suckler cows and 300 breeding ewes. Gethin also grows a variety of crops. In 2011 the farm was selected as the Welsh winner for the Nature of Farming Awards.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced onto your farm?

Farmers need to produce food that optimises the use of finite resources, minimises environmental impacts and embraces and enhances nature. Our method of mixed farming is more nature friendly, as it protects the land and soil and creates greater diversity of habitats for wildlife.

What have been the impacts of Nature friendly farming practices?

Nature friendly farming has a positive impact on the lives of animals as well as farmers. We have saved £3,000 a year from adopting nature friendly practices. For example, we are more self-sufficient in feed and straw for our livestock as well as providing winter food and habitat for farmland birds.

CASE STUDY—GETHIN OWEN

How has nature friendly farming made your farm more sustainable and financially viable in the long term?

Implementing a more self-sufficient system, based on attempting to optimise the natural productivity of the farm, has meant the business is financially viable in the long term. We buy few inputs in the form of feed and fertiliser, meaning we are less exposed to the volatility of commodity prices. Through implementing the principles of a more traditional, mixed farming system, we are also less exposed to the effects of variable weather, weeds, pests and diseases.

What do you need from government, post Brexit, to continue farming in a nature friendly way?

We need financial support to provide public goods that we can't sell on the marketplace. The government needs to provide financial assistance to ensure we can continue to benefit the environment and our lives. Farmers being paid public money just for owning land is unacceptable and has been one of the most damaging aspects of agriculture policy during the last 50 years.

How can the government raise the environmental standards across the farming industry?

To raise environmental standards, the government needs to disincentivise unhealthy, unsustainable and damaging farming systems. Farmers should be supported to implement more sustainable, nature-friendly systems with higher standards.

What would be your core message/advice to the government/other farmers to make the most of nature-friendly farming?

High input farming systems are unsustainable, damaging, and not always more profitable. Governments need to take action now and ensure farmers stop using unsustainable and damaging methods. It is also important that government funding makes the products produced by nature friendly farmers affordable to consumers, accounting for the social costs of the products too. 💧



“Nature friendly farming has a positive impact on the lives of animals as well as farmers. We have saved £3,000 a year from adopting nature-friendly practices.”

CASE STUDY

NEIL HESELTINE

HILL TOP FARM, ENGLAND



Neil was born and brought up at Hill Top Farm in Yorkshire. In 2003, as part of a conservation grazing scheme, Neil re-introduced 20 Belted Galloway cattle to join the Swaledale sheep flock. This changed his farm ethos, as he sought more environmentally friendly production methods.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced onto your farm?

I increasingly see the role of a farmer as delivering a combination of food production, carbon capture and biodiversity. Our nature friendly farming practices encompass this, for example, we have reduced stocking rates and have rebalanced our livestock to include cattle and sheep. We have also reduced the use of antibiotics, breeding healthier animals. Our meadows support plant life and nesting habitats for birds, and we leave sufficient time before mowing to allow birds to lay eggs and for the chicks to fledge.

What have been the impacts of Nature friendly farming practices?

There has been a clear increase in biodiversity over the years. From wildflowers to animals -farming in harmony with nature has been a win-win for us. By managing our grazing in a nature friendly way and being more aware of what is going into our animals, we believe we are now producing healthier products for human consumption.

CASE STUDY—NEIL HESELTINE

How has nature friendly farming made your farm more sustainable and financially viable in the long term?

Nature friendly farming has made our farm more profitable in the long run, and a greater amount of that profit is coming from the farm itself. Our profitability is also more consistent over the years because nature friendly practices have made our farm more resilient to challenges posed by weather and price fluctuations.

What do you need from government, post Brexit, to continue farming in a nature friendly way?

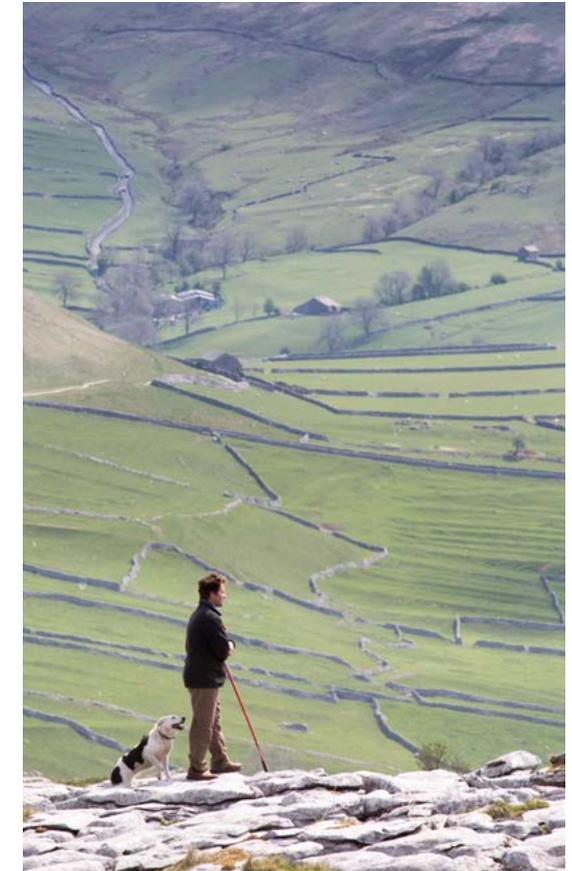
I'm encouraged by what the government has said over the last three years, however, they need to act. The promises made need to come to fruition more quickly than they are - the industry needs to go down a route that incentivises nature friendly farming and doesn't pay farmers purely for owning land.

How can the government raise the environmental standards across the farming industry?

Incentives are the best way to increase standards across the farming industry. There also has to be accountability, whether that is in the form of enforcement from an environmental body or by farmers showing evidence of what they are doing. If farmers can prove we are making a difference, then, the whole dynamic of the farming industry changes.

What would be your core message/advice to the government/other farmers to make the most of nature-friendly farming?

It's been an extremely fulfilling process creating a balance between my livestock and nature, and I encourage all farmers to do the same. The sooner governments implement the right incentives, more farmers will be encouraged to make the changes. 🍀



“I increasingly see the role of a farmer as delivering a combination of food production, carbon capture and biodiversity.”

SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FARMING SYSTEM

The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) is a farmer-led independent organisation, established in November 2017, uniting more than 1,600 farmers across the UK who are committed to managing their land for wildlife and public goods, at the same time as growing and providing safe, healthy and nutritious food.

We come from a range of backgrounds big and small, organic and conventional. We are passionate about ensuring our countryside is productive and bursting with wildlife. We hope to highlight that farming and nature can go hand in hand, feeding the nation, including challenging moments such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Farmers can lead the way, however, achieving a sustainable farming system that also delivers a climate and nature recovery requires comprehensive policy and legislative frameworks in each of the four countries. To ensure the farming industry does not go bust, and to deliver food security for everyone, policy needs to take into account the balance between producing food from the land, working with nature and protecting farming businesses.



THE UK GOVERNMENT'S AGRICULTURE BILL

The UK Government's Agriculture Bill is a landmark piece of legislation, designed to set the foundations for our future funding framework for farmers and will provide parliamentarians with one of the most important opportunities in recent times to help the UK transition towards a more resilient, nature-friendly food and farming system.

Because of our values and collective experience, the NFFN believes that the UK Government's Agriculture Bill and associated funding mechanisms must help farmers to produce safe, healthy food at the same time as helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish, providing:

1. 'Public money for public goods' secured long-term, not undermined by additional clauses on food production but focused on supporting nature-friendly farming.
2. High environmental standards for trade deals, enshrined in law, so that UK farmers are not undercut by low-quality, cheap imports and our carbon footprint is not exported.
3. Strong environmental regulations to raise current nature and climate standards on all farms.
4. Long-term funding and certainty so farmers are properly rewarded for environmental goods into the future.

The NFFN welcomes the public money for public goods approach in the UK Government's Agriculture Bill, which will create an effective landscape model for future food production. In fact, hundreds of farmers are already leading the way on sustainable farming, and the NFFN is tackling tackles the perception of 'farmers vs the environment'.

We believe that the shift towards a nature-friendly farming approach is not just good for wildlife but is key to the long-term survival of farming, delivering broader benefits to the public, including flood protection, climate change mitigation, water and air quality, and access to thriving natural landscapes. 'Public money for public goods' will support farmers to deliver all these benefits and produce sustainable food into the future.

NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING IN ALL FOUR NATIONS

Whilst the UK Government's Agriculture Bill in Westminster primarily focuses on England, it will have implications for all four UK nations. The NFFN works across the UK, supporting farmers in the devolved countries and we recognise that policy and farming demands are different in each nation.

In Northern Ireland, the NFFN supports calls for:

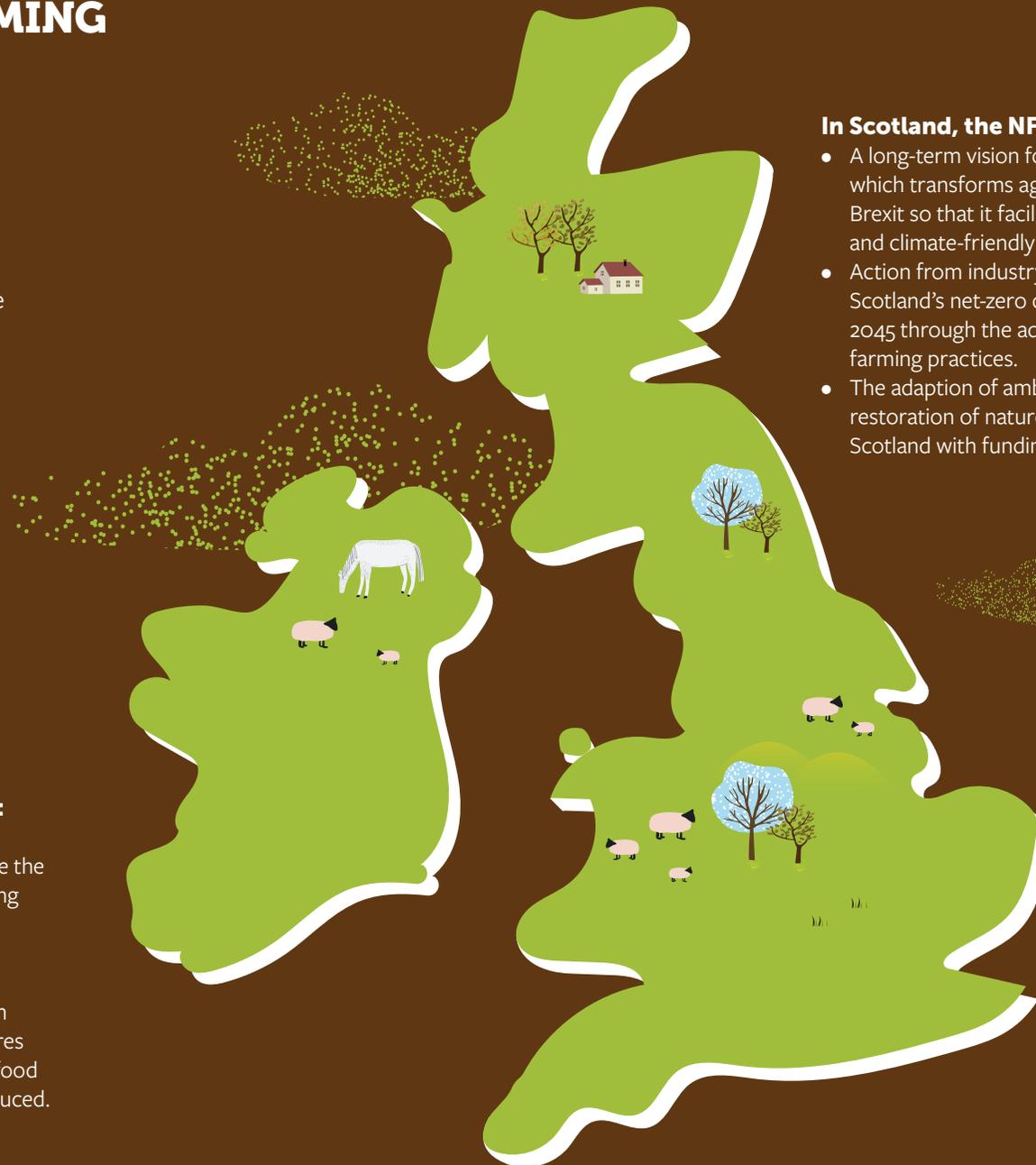
- An ambitious post-Brexit agricultural policy which is backed by devolved legislation in Northern Ireland.
- Urgent action on climate change which supports farmers to meet net-zero through the adoption of nature-friendly farming practices.
- The adoption of ambitious targets for the restoration of nature and the environment in Northern Ireland, with clear timelines.

In Wales, the NFFN supports calls for:

- A transition to a progressive post-Brexit agriculture policy in Wales that helps tackle the climate and ecological crises by encouraging and rewarding nature-friendly farming.
- Wales' agricultural sector to be net-zero carbon by 2040.
- A new food system for Wales to better join up food and farming policy; one that ensures farmers earn a fair return whilst ensuring food is healthy, affordable, and sustainably produced.

In Scotland, the NFFN supports calls for:

- A long-term vision for Scottish Agriculture, which transforms agricultural policy post-Brexit so that it facilitates and rewards nature and climate-friendly farming.
- Action from industry and government to meet Scotland's net-zero climate change targets by 2045 through the adaptation of nature-friendly farming practices.
- The adoption of ambitious targets for the restoration of nature and the environment in Scotland with funding to support them.



TRANSITIONING THE UK'S FARMING INDUSTRY

The NFFN supports farmers across the UK that are working around the clock to produce nutritious food while delivering benefits for the environment and reversing wildlife decline.

From restoring vital field margins, species-rich grasslands, and wildflower meadows, to agroecological farming practices, reducing pesticide use and soil damage, as well as creating new habits, like ponds and wetlands on farms, NFFN farmers have been part of a significant shift in UK farming towards more environmentally and sustainable farming methods. We also support proper training and advice for farmers; support for tenant farmers, county farms and new entrants and the reduction of harmful pesticides.

Many of these farming practices can be rolled out across different locations and part of our work is sharing this information between farmers, so that best practices are learnt by as many farmers as possible. Indeed, we are passionate believers that peer-to-peer support and education is crucial to supporting farmers to effectively make this transition to more sustainable farming methods. 🍓

JOIN THE NFFN AND USE YOUR VOICE TO CALL FOR A CLIMATE AND NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING FUTURE

Now is the time for the everyone to lobby their elected representatives, share their voice and call for a resilient, nature-friendly food and farming system. Here are 4 ways you can help to support a nature-friendly farming future:

1. Contact your MP

Email and contact your MP to ask them to support the NFFN's key policy asks (see above) to help our farmers produce safe, healthy food at the same time as helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish.

2. Share this report

Share this report and tag your local MP/MS/MSP/MLA and elected officials to ask them to support our key policy asks, using #NatureFriendlyFarming and/ or #NatureMeansBusiness.

3. Join the NFFN for free

Join the NFFN for free as a public or farmer member to stay up to date with how you can support local nature-friendly farmers and our food system.

4. Use your purchasing power

Use your purchasing power, check the labels and buy from local farmers that farm sustainably.

For more information please contact: info@nffn.org.uk
www.nffn.org | @NFFNUK | #NatureMeansBusiness

The NFFN is grateful for the ongoing support from its advisory partners and other leading organisations including the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, National Trust, Soil Association the Butterfly Conservation Trust, Buglife and more.



PHOTO: KAREN BURR

Matt Shardlow,
Chief Executive,
Buglife



“There is lots of evidence that healthy populations of insect pollinators and predators make for healthy food production, but as things stand insect populations are in steep decline. We must shape a new agriculture where there is more safe space for insects to thrive. In the lowlands high quality habitats have become fragments that we must now reconnect, while the uplands have become shorn and require a proliferation of plant structure in which wildlife will thrive.”

Ellie Brodie,
Head of Land
Management,
The Wildlife Trusts



“The message from the Nature Friendly Farming Network is clear – it makes sense to farm with nature rather than against it. It makes sense for wildlife, for the climate, for human health and ultimately for farmers’ wallets – now and in the future.”

Tom Lancaster,
Head of Land, Seas
and Climate Policy,
RSPB



“This is such an important report highlighting as it does the demand for change to address the climate and ecological crises. It demonstrates real and practical ways in which farmers can help address these challenges and at the same time strengthen their businesses, only by supporting such positive change through the UK Government’s Agriculture Bill can we ensure that nature can thrive alongside a safe and healthy society.”

STATEMENTS FROM SUPPORTERS

John Martin,
Project Manager,
Nature Matters,
Northern Ireland



“This excellent report highlights the vital role that Nature Friendly Farming must play in tackling the nature and climate emergencies. Not only that, it demonstrates how such action can improve a farm’s bottom line. We must harness these lessons to transition to a new era for farming, which delivers great food, a countryside rich in nature and helps to meet ambitious climate targets.”

Pete Ritchie,
Convenor, Food
and Farming Group
of Scottish
Environment Link



“We welcome the latest report from the Nature Friendly Farming Network which once again highlights that the public believes farmers should be rewarded for producing food in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. We need future agricultural policies in Scotland and across the other governments in the United Kingdom which help enable farmers to deliver this.”

Roger Thomas
Chair, Wales
Environment Link



“The NFFN’s Nature Means Business report highlights that nature and farming are inextricably linked. The Less is More approach, adopted by farmers like Gethin Owen at Nant yr Efail, shows that nature friendly farming not only helps to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies, but it also makes good business sense. It’s vital that Governments in Wales and across the UK develop future agriculture policies that facilitates and fully reward farmers for the work they do in maintaining and enhancing nature and the environment.”

Philip Lymbery
Global Chief
Executive Officer,
Compassion in
World Farming



“Let’s focus on producing better quality food that puts animals back on the land where they belong. Let’s bring landscapes back to life with animals grazing on sustainable, well-managed and biodiverse farms. Nature friendly farming to me is the future of farming, bring it on.”

Liz Bowles,
Associate Director
Farming and Land
Use, Soil Association



“We endorse this report and ask the Government to shift policies towards a nature friendly approach, which is not only good for wildlife but is key to the long-term survival of farming, delivering broader benefits to the public. The Soil Association is committed to supporting a whole farm system transition to agroecological farming (organic farming being the best known example) over the next decade. Farming in this way removes many of the currently damaging externalities of our current food production systems, while addressing our threefold climate, nature and health crises..”

Rob Macklin
Head of Soils
and Farming,
National Trust



“This compelling report brings together a range of real-life examples showing how nature friendly farming can deliver positive environmental gains and make sound economic sense. In an age of declining species and climate change it is in all our interests to support farming systems that benefit nature, climate and people.”



Join the NFFN for free at
www.nffn.org.uk/join-us



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#NatureMeansBusiness @NFFNUK